



# Patuxent River Oil Spill in Maryland

## *A cooperative natural resource damage assessment*

*In April 2000, a pipeline ruptured spilling more than 140,000 gallons of oil in Maryland's Patuxent River, a tributary of the Chesapeake Bay. The spill injured or destroyed numerous resources, including wetlands and beaches and hundreds of ruddy ducks and other birds.*

While response agencies worked to contain and clean up the oil, NOAA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State of Maryland initiated a natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) of injured resources. These federal and state agencies act as trustees on behalf of the public to assess and restore resources injured by oil spills.

Trustee agencies have worked cooperatively with Pepco and ST Services, the respective owner and operator of the pipeline, throughout the NRDA. In December 2002, these parties agreed to pay \$2,710,498, the cost of projects to restore injured resources and services.

## Injured Natural Resources

To evaluate the oil impacts, trustees conducted multiple studies. After data review and analyses, trustees determined the oil affected the following—

- Wetlands - 76 acres lightly, moderately, or heavily oiled
- Beaches - 10 acres lightly, moderately, or heavily oiled
- Ruddy ducks and other birds - 696 dead
- Diamondback terrapins - 122 dead and a 10% reduction in hatchlings for 2000
- Muskrats - 376 dead
- Fish and shellfish - 5,432 lbs. lost
- Benthic communities - 4,974 lbs. lost
- Recreational services - 125,000 river trips impacted

## Restoration

After a public review and comment period, trustees selected the following ecological and recreational restoration projects to address the above injuries. Construction

on all projects is expected to be completed within the next year.

**Create roughly six acres of intertidal marsh wetland** adjacent to Washington Creek, a tributary of the Patuxent River. This wetland will be similar to those impacted by the spill and provide habitat for juvenile fish, shellfish, birds, and mammals; improve water quality by filtering sediments and other pollutants from the water column; and provide storm surge and flood protection.

**Enhance shoreline** by creating roughly one acre of beach habitat to benefit diamondback terrapins and other organisms.

**Restore ruddy duck nesting habitat** and acquire perpetual protective easements in areas of the Prairie Pothole Region of the Midwest. Ruddy ducks breed in wetlands located in the Midwest and southern Canada and migrate to the Chesapeake Bay to spend the winter. Restoring and protecting their nesting habitats will enhance ruddy duck populations in the bay.

**Create roughly five acres of oyster reef sanctuary** in the Patuxent River to address injuries to fish, shellfish, birds, and benthic communities. Oyster reefs enhance benthic communities, increase aquatic food for fish, birds, and waterfowl, and improve water quality by filtering out sediments and pollutants from the water column.

**Address the estimated 125,000 river trips** affected by the spill—

- Create two canoe/kayak paddle-in campsites on the Patuxent River (one in Prince George's County and one in St. Mary's County),



- Establish a disabled-accessible kayak/canoe launch at Greenwell State Park in St. Mary's County,
- Improve recreational opportunities at Maxwell Hall Natural Resource Management Area in Charles County,
- Improve the Forest Landing boat ramp and replace existing fishing pier in St. Mary's County,
- Rebuild a boardwalk and provide canoes for a river education program at King's Landing in Calvert County, and
- Establish boat access at Nans Cove in Calvert County.

**NOAA acts as a trustee on behalf of the public to restore coastal and marine resources injured by oil spills and hazardous substance releases.** To learn more, please contact—

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